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ABSTRACT

It is possible for at-risk students to perform at demanding academic levels, and their achievement can be improved dramatically in a relatively short time. Effective ways to teach at-risk children have already been identified; no new research is needed. This report covers the following specific issues related to educating high-risk students. It describes and explains: (1) appropriate pedagogy; (2) the concept of at-risk; (2) the impotence of reform attempts; (3) problems with the use of effective-schools research results; (4) making success with at-risk students a reality; (5) teacher education and at-risk students; (6) the failure of educators to be guided by known success; (7) why well-intended public policy efforts fail; and (8) making public policy for success with at-risk students. The report also provides a list of the following examples of effective programs for at-risk students: (1) "Ball-Stick-Bird"; (2) Marcus Garvey School; (3) Project SEED; (4) Dunbar Elementary School; (5) Dynamic Assessment and Instrumental Enrichment; and (6) Adult Literacy. Two resources and 15 references are included. (JS)

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PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SUCCESSFUL INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

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Many educators are able to teach at-risk students so that the overwhelming majority of those students are able to master a regular academic curriculum. Herbert Walberg's paper summarizes much of the effective schools/effective teaching literature. However, I would like to cite several examples of effective instruction with at-risk students.

Ball-Stick-Bird (Fuller, 1977). This is a reading program that I and many other educators have used. Children and adults, including "retarded" and "learning-disabled," actually learn to read a simple sentence in the first twenty minutes of instruction, even before the full alphabet and phonics system are learned!

Marcus Garvey School. Several years ago this private school, which serves mostly low-income African Americans in a low-income Los Angeles neighborhood, challenged a magnet school for the gifted in the Los Angeles City Schools. The third-grade class at Garvey defeated the sixth-grade class at the school for gifted children on a basic skills test! When the Garvey school first started operations, none of its teachers had a college degree.

Project SEED. Nearly twenty years ago a high-school teacher in the Berkeley, California, public schools became alarmed at the rate of failure of so many minority children. He decided to start a program to improve the self-image of these children. He reasoned that the shortest route to that goal was to teach the most prestigious academic subject (mathematics, not arithmetic) at a relatively advanced level to the low-performing students. Elementary-grade students who could solve equations with unknowns and understand exponentiation logarithms and other mathematical operations developed a more favorable image of themselves, especially since this subject and topics are normally offered during high school or during the first year of college. Project SEED has now been demonstrated all over the United States and in foreign countries. It has been demonstrated to state legislatures and even to the Congress. At least one public school system Dallas, has

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tried it on a broad basis over several years. Though costly to operate because of the use of outside teachers from private industry, the pedagogy is appropriate for any teacher. Oddly enough, it is virtually unknown in teacher-education institutions.

Dunbar Elementary School is a public school in one of Atlanta's lowest-income areas. Over the past decade, Dunbar students have ranked near the top of the distribution of school averages on basic skills tests. Dunbar has not followed any special "canned" program nor used any gimmicks or special equipment. The principal, Ms. Marjorie Gosier, says that she merely leads the faculty in its role as a professional problem-solving team.

Dynamic Assessment and Instrumental Enrichment. Dr. Reuven Feuerstein (1979), a student of Jean Piaget and Andre Rey, was charged by the government of Israel to create a solution to a national problem. Many immigrants to Israel had not been exposed to Western systems of formal schooling. Dr. Feuerstein created an approach to overcome the deficiencies in cognitive functioning that he concluded were caused by the absence of exposure to the type of thinking required in schools. Through the use of this approach, many low-performing students have been transformed dramatically. Many students now in special-education classes are fully capable of functioning effectively in regular academic classes with confidence, if provided with Feuerstein's sophisticated diagnostic and mediation program. (Note: Many low-performing students have never been exposed to appropriate mediation in the form of teaching. Therefore, we do not remediate what was never mediated in the first place.)

Adult Literacy. Paulo Freire (1973) taught adults in poverty who were illiterate to read well enough to read their daily newspaper with about thirty hours of instruction! Freire is finally being recognized in the United States for his liberation pedagogy, a pedagogy that uses reading as a vehicle for teaching critical thought and critical consciousness to adults who seemed to have given up and joined the "culture of silence."

Many more examples could be cited. It is not my intention to urge the adoption of any of these particular programs, although I am highly impressed with all of them. I cite these examples merely to show that many people are already successful in teaching at-risk students. I also want to use these examples to make a few points about pedagogy. Among other things, these few examples teach us that

1. At-risk students can be taught successfully to perform at demanding academic levels.
2. Dramatic positive changes in the academic achievement of at-risk students are possible within a short period of time.

3. There is no one way to achieve success with at-risk students. Some of the examples cited above were of formal programs. Some involved specialized materials. Others, such as Project SEED, Dunbar Elementary, and Freire's work, involved no specialized materials or formal programs. Success was possible within public or private school settings.

4. We know how to help at-risk students now!

5. There are no absolute critical periods with human beings. It is never too late to learn.

6. At-risk students thrive on intellectual challenge, not on low-level remedial work. The successful approaches do not imitate the procedures for pigeon training. Abstract, conceptually oriented critical thought stimulates low-performing students.

7. There is no special pedagogy for at-risk students. The pedagogy that works for them is good for all students. Further, at-risk students fail to achieve because appropriate regular pedagogy has not been provided to them.

8. There are not natural racial or ethnic barriers to teaching success. The examples that I have cited above involve every conceivable combination of teachers and students by race and ethnicity. The real issue is teacher competency and will.

9. No new research is needed. We have hundreds of examples of good teaching in action. We need to spread the word. This is not to minimize the key role that research will play in education. I merely want to emphasize that at-risk students do not have to wait until some magical mystery solution is invented. They can be helped with what is now known!

10. It is interesting to me that most of these approaches apparently are not well-known to teacher educators, even in the cities where programs are headquartered and in some cases have been located for nearly two decades. Moreover, many teacher-education institutions seem not to be aware of many, if any, locations where teachers are successful with at-risk students.

11. In all of the cases I cited, the schools or teachers achieved the results alone. No large-scale mobilization of parents was required. The basic demographics of the communities were unchanged. None of the negative forces often cited to explain the failure of instruction operated to derail these teachers. Naturally, we want poverty to be eliminated. Naturally, we want children to be with both parents and to be well nourished. However, in the absence of these things, good teaching can still produce success in learning.

In short, the evidence is overwhelming. Teaching is a potent force. The real problem is to manage the politics so that good teaching can be provided for all students.

Many years ago, the late Ronald Edmonds, whom many consider the father of the effective-schools movement, made this statement: "We already know everything that we need to know in order to educate all of the children. Whether we do or do not, depends in the final analysis upon how we feel about the fact that we have not done so, so far." Edmonds and his associates developed a body of literature based on their research which showed that all children, regardless of race and socioeconomic status, were fully capable of achieving in the regular academic program of the school. Actually, the real meaning of Edmonds' research had less to do with the capabilities of children than with the capabilities of school people. Prior to the school-effectiveness movement, it was widely believed among professionals and others associated with the public school that school factors did not determine children's success in school. When children failed in school, explanations for their failure almost invariably concluded that the causal factors were family income, nutrition, cultural deprivation, and so forth. The idea that schools alone could change their practices so that children's achievement would rise significantly was almost a heresy.

Now researchers know what many good educators have known and said all along. These conclusions can be summed up as follows:

1. The vast majority of at-risk children are fully capable of succeeding in the academic program of the public schools.
2. At-risk children do not need anything special by way of pedagogy. In the overwhelming majority of the cases, the at-risk children fail because an appropriate quality of *regular instruction* is not made available to them.
3. Even under circumstances where at-risk children have fallen behind in their academic work, when given appropriate regular pedagogy, they can catch up with their age peers and, under certain circumstances, may even do better than average for their age group.

THE AT-RISK CONCEPT

If these things are true, what do we mean by "at-risk child"? For many people, the term indicates a student with certain specific mental deficiencies. Such a student is sometimes considered not simply to be deficient in achievement but also to be deficient in the basic capacity to achieve.

However, there is another way of thinking about what places the child at risk. A child, through no fault of his or her own, may be placed in a situation where *access* to an appropriate quality of regular instruction is restricted. For example, poverty and minority-group status are likely to place children at risk for the simple reason that both of those factors are often associated with the lack of distribution of high-quality services to children. Teacher turnover may be very

high in low-income neighborhoods. Further, many professionals regard assignments to schools in more-affluent areas as most desirable; hence there is greater competition among able professionals for such assignments. Many teachers also try to avoid or resist being assigned to less-desirable schools. The net effect is that children do not have an equal opportunity to be exposed to the best teachers schools have to offer.

Consequently, the greatest risk poor and minority children may face is that which comes from our incorrect perception of the problem. Such a perception causes us to blame the child for what we have failed to provide and to search for solutions through an examination of children rather than systems.

THE IMPOTENCE OF REFORM

During the past decade, in spite of numerous school-reform reports and abundant school-effectiveness and teacher-effectiveness research, most efforts have failed to address meaningfully the problems of low-achieving students or students considered to be at risk. Many of the school reform reports are not equity-oriented at all. A few school-reform reports appear to be "excellence"-oriented. Some educators have suspected that the "excellence" terminology is sometimes used not as evidence of a concern for excellence at all, but as a code word to signal a retreat from the decade of "Great Society" equity efforts in education. Even if this is not the case, there is little or nothing in the school reform reports and effectiveness research in general that offers promise for the massive changes in education necessary to save the huge number of children in our systems who are at risk.

While school-effectiveness and teacher-effectiveness research have answered certain questions, they still leave other very important questions unanswered. For example, it is clear that schools can be turned around. They can produce academic achievement where it was not expected or predicted. However, virtually all of the school-effectiveness and teacher-effectiveness research suffers from the same general flaw. The researchers' criterion for success in almost all cases has been the achievement by students of *minimum competencies*, usually in "basic skills." Tests of basic skills are given to students before and after some type of instructional treatment or when comparing different types of educational settings.

What is missing from the research is a set of studies that use *maximum-competency* criteria. This is important, since once successful schools are identified using minimum-competency criteria, then various types of fine-grained analyses of school processes are undertaken. Participant observation, ethnography, or other forms of examination of school practices help to explain the successes that are seen. Based upon such analyses, general characteristics of effective schools have been identified. But as stated earlier, these are characteristics that describe schools that are effective in producing *minimum* rather than *maximum* competencies.

Some educators assume it takes the same type of professional effort to produce minimum competencies as it does to produce maximum competencies. My field experiences tell me this simply is not the case. Having observed many maximum-competency schools in operation, I have found many characteristics present in them that were not identified in the minimum-competency research. For example, many maximum-competency schools seem to rely upon high levels of academic preparation for the teaching staff; the development of a special ethos; a shared high-level academic mission among the faculty; and the extensive and appropriate use of well-conceived and well-planned field trips, outside speakers, and so forth. We need a great deal of research to determine if these and other variables typify the maximum-competency schools.

PROBLEMS WITH THE USE OF EFFECTIVE-SCHOOLS RESEARCH RESULTS

I also believe educators find great difficulty in putting the results of school-effectiveness research and the recommendations from the school-reform reports into practice, for a very simple reason. Committees, observers, and researchers usually participate in a data-rich environment. That is to say, when they observe live situations or when indirect observations are made close to the source, many things become apparent other than the specific things the researcher is interested in and will later report. Such additional things may actually be major factors influencing success.

However, reports of research usually are presented in summary form. For example, the whole body of school-effectiveness research has been summarized into checklists usually numbering a dozen or so items. While these checklists may indeed identify general critical characteristics of an effective minimum-competency school, it is difficult to use them, as some educators do, for direct planning of day-to-day professional activities. For example, if one characteristic of an effective school is that "the leader monitors closely the work of teachers and students," then we have a simple statement of what may in fact be a complex reality with many possibilities. There are an unlimited number of ways by which an educational leader may perform such monitoring. The particular ways that are chosen must be responsive to the personal styles, and characteristics of the people involved and to the context within which monitoring is to occur. It is very difficult to go from the general principle that monitoring should occur to particular requirements about the *way* that monitoring should occur.

The school-reform reports, the school-effectiveness reports, and the teacher-effectiveness reports can, should, and often do serve to stimulate the best in professional thinking and, hopefully, in practice as well. However, something more is needed if the benefits of these insights are to be made available to teachers and students.

MAKING SUCCESS WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS REAL

It is extremely important for educators to realize that live examples exist of what to do. I have found such examples in schools in almost every major city!

However, I have seen few examples that are districtwide. One of the most surprising things to me is that in district after district I have visited, local examples of success are not widely known among either the teaching staff of the district or among the administrative staff. Occasionally, outstanding local examples of success that are publicized in the popular media appear to be resented by some who do not know about the example from firsthand experience.

It is unlikely that school-district leadership can use existing local examples as universal models to be applied throughout an entire district. But what can be applied throughout the district is the identification of high-quality site leadership, which in turn would be allowed the flexibility to do what was necessary to produce an effective school, especially an effective school at the maximum-competency level. This does not mean that a laissez-faire school leadership situation should be established. Nor does it mean that examples of excellence cannot be useful for educators other than at a particular local school site. What we must remember is that while maximum-competency models may not be easily mass- produced, they can be used in other ways. The central administration can make it possible for school-site leaders to visit schools that are examples of success.

It has been my experience that there are far too few opportunities for such visitations to take place. As a result, many excellent examples of school leadership go unobserved by peers. For such examples to be useful, teachers and administrators must make frequent, in-depth visits and have opportunities for discussion among peers.

In the final analysis, there is no substitute for the professional judgment of the school-site leader, i.e., the principal, even while that leader must be accountable for results to central authority. The leadership functions of a principal cannot be standardized or made mechanical. The element of professional judgment must always be considered. However, this judgment can be influenced significantly by a broader awareness of school success with at-risk students. *Many principals have never seen a successful school that serves at-risk students.* Therefore, they have no models with which to work. Many such principals will actually hear about the reports of research on effective schools and on effective teaching. Most of them accept this research intellectually, but may not be able to internalize it at an operational level in the absence of opportunities to experience a concrete reality.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND AT-RISK STUDENTS

Many children are at risk because of the quality of the teacher-education process. Like public-school education, teacher education also has been undergoing reform. Many new proposals for teacher-education reform have been made. Among the most recent reform reports are the Carnegie Corporation and Holmes Group reports. However, these reports seem to contain many of the weaknesses of public-school reform reports. In the case of teacher education, changes are recommended with no data to show that those changes will mean better teaching as measured by better results in student academic achievement

or other forms of achievement. If the basic "it," or standard content, of teacher education does not change, then making other changes will be like rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*.

Every teacher education institution should be able to identify a pool of successful schools for at-risk students. Such successful schools can serve as examples and as laboratories for teacher training and administrative leadership training. I continue to be amazed that virtually all of the most powerful examples of successful teaching approaches for at-risk children I know about are infrequently used by faculty of the regular teacher-education programs in cities where they are located. For example, Project SEED is located in Berkeley, California, and is headquartered in Washington, D. C. It is a very successful teaching approach that has been used for almost two decades. It teaches high-level mathematical skills in algebra to elementary-school children from kindergarten through sixth grade. Yet, in spite of the success of this pedagogy, there has been little or no involvement of university teacher-education faculty in the observation, analysis, and utilization of Project SEED's strategies in teacher training. The same thing may be said of Dr. Feuerstein's model for working with low-performing children in special education, *The Dynamic Assessment of Retarded Performers* (diagnostic testing) and *Instrumental Enrichment* (remedial teaching). This failure to use successful approaches would be understandable if other effective or successful approaches to teaching at-risk students were well known and widely presented in teacher-education programs. However, this does not appear to be the case.

Above all, teacher-education programs must have *valid models* of service to at-risk children for demonstration purposes. Ideally, they should have many valid models.

WHY DO WE FAIL TO BE GUIDED BY KNOWN SUCCESS?

One may ask why, if the knowledge of how to be successful with at-risk children is available and if it has been available for a long period of time, such knowledge has not been transferred. I believe there are several reasons:

1. Many of the successful models are simply not studied at all. For example, many private schools are consistently successful in producing high levels of academic achievement for their students, including at-risk students. In fact, some of these private schools, such as the Marcus Garvey School in Los Angeles, were established for the exclusive purpose of educating at-risk students. Yet we have little or no research that would enable us to describe what is going on in such successful maximum-competency private school operations. Therefore, these schools' understanding of success cannot be transferred easily to other schools.
2. Many of the studies of effective instruction are not ethnographic studies. The research models that have been popular in education for decades are primarily statistical and static. The *process* of education itself is not studied

often enough through the most sensitive methodologies available for that purpose. Participant observation, ethnography, and other forms of anthropological observation are often better suited for studying school processes than are those which have been developed for psychological research. Shirley B. Heath's *Ways with Words* and Ray Rist's *The Urban School: A Factor for Failure* are examples of the types of revelations possible when appropriate methodologies are used.

3. Many studies miss the active principles in success even if they are ethnographic or participant-observation studies. This is dependent upon the degree of sophistication and insights of the researchers. For example, Dr. Barbara Sizemore's study of effective schools identifies several variables that have been missed by most school-effectiveness researchers (Sizemore, 1985, forthcoming). One of thses variables is particularly interesting. Dr. Sizemore describes a general attitude of successful principals: "They have made a decision that they don't want to be superintendents." The statement captures the independent, single-minded, task-oriented, risk-taking streak that is present in many successful principals. For example, such principals would not accept the assignment of faculty to their school who they believed would not get the best work from children. As a result, many such administrators were frequently in trouble with the central office and were often seen as noncooperative.

   Another example of locating the active principle in success is found in the work of William Johntz in Project SEED. For Johntz the academic preparation of teachers in mathematics is critical. It is only when that preparation can be assured that the matter of pedagogy should be faced. Then the type of pedagogy becomes extremely important. In this situation, as in the case of Mortimer Adler with his *Padeia Proposal*, the foundation of the pedagogy should be the "Socratic" questioning method, a method that can be executed successfully only if the teacher has a broad and deep reservoir of content.

   The active principle in success, for Dr. Feuerstein, is that *mental structures* for poorly performing students must be changed. The goal of his system of Dynamic Assessment and Instrumental Enrichment is structural *cognitive modification*, or fundamental changes in the basic habits and patterns of information processing. In the case of Freire, the *use by the teacher of the student's prior knowledge* and the *awakening of the student* by the teacher to the student's own creative history as the foundation for critical dialogue are key principles. Still other educational leaders have pointed to the social environment surrounding the schools that can operate in support of the school. Community awareness of the school, community participation in the school, and especially school participation in the community all point to active but hidden ingredients in some schools' success.

4. Many studies waste time and resources with a focus on presumed environmental preconditions for learning rather than upon successful

instructional practices, regardless of the environment. Such studies deflect the attention of professionals to things that are not truly essential in the design of good teaching practices.

5. Many "projects" are funded for implementation without sufficient infrastructure to support the intervention. For example, the Detroit Public School System recently made a commitment to implement a program of Dynamic Assessment and Instrumental Enrichment. The superficial way to implement such a program would have been to provide minimal training for a small group of teachers and psychologists who were to receive Dynamic Assessment training and for the group of teachers who were to receive training in Instrumental Enrichment (remedial instruction). However, the Director of Special Education and her associates understood very quickly that much more would be needed to prevent those individuals who had learned new methodologies from being absorbed into a vast system, being isolated within the system, and operating without reinforcement. As a result, the Department of Special Education made special efforts to build a strong infrastructure within the school system so that the program would have the greatest chance of success. The building of that infrastructure included the following elements:
   a. Sufficient numbers of professionals were trained in order to have a critical mass within the district who "spoke the same language" and could serve to critique district efforts.
   b. Proceeding on the fact that many things learned are quickly forgotten if not reinforced, the school system provided extra depth in the professional training process. Efforts of all teachers were reinforced through extra in-depth training, numerous opportunities for professionals in the program to meet and review what they had been doing, and opportunities to plan for joint activities in the future. Many other steps were taken to build the infrastructure in support of Detroit's professionals. Those efforts appear to be paying off.

All of these factors together help explain why knowledge we have about how to succeed with at-risk students is not transferred into regular practice.

WHY WELL-INTENDED PUBLIC POLICY EFFORTS FAIL

Why does public policy seem to show such inconsistent or poor effects? Many educators and policymakers have succeeded in establishing rules and programs designed to help at-risk students. Yet many of these efforts have not borne the fruits their designers hoped for. There are many reasons for this failure, including the following reasons:

1. Often, with the best of intentions, policymakers actually mandate poor practice. For example, the Education of the Handicapped Act (Public Law

94-142) was designed primarily as an accountability system to guarantee due process and equal access for children to educational opportunity. As a part of that process of accountability, an *individual education program* (IEP) for children was required. This requirement has resulted in massive activity among educators all across the country. As I have observed, it has also been massively misunderstood. Many educators have tended to view the IEP as a pedagogical tool, whether or not they have faith in it as a tool, instead of as an accountability instrument. Yet, to my knowledge, there are no data to show that the use of IEPs results in greater gains for children in school.

2. Many public policy efforts maintain a "mission control" mentality. This means that the management of day-to-day instructional decision making often tends to be centralized outside the school site. This is seen most clearly in the many reading programs in use in some school districts. The adoption of a basal series almost requires that all teachers approach the teaching of reading in exactly the same way, even on the same schedule. The poor results of such practice with at-risk students should suggest the need for extreme caution in mandating the day-by-day actions of teachers.
3. Policymakers are confronted with the decision of whether to use the "stick" or the "carrot" in putting requirements before teachers. I believe that the vast majority of teachers want desperately to succeed. They want to enjoy their work; they want to receive the feedback that comes from doing a job well. Most will take risks in order to improve their professional skills and to try new approaches that may succeed with children who are at risk. Categorically, the carrot is better than the stick in encouraging that participation.
4. Policymakers often legitimize false categories, leading ultimately to the instant institutionalization of poor practice. For example, I can think of little worse in school pedagogy today than the long-time use of the categories "educable mentally retarded" and "learning-disabled." Especially for the category "learning-disabled," there is no professionally agreed-upon definition whatsoever. We do not know what it is; we do not know how it works, or if it does. And there certainly are no specialized pedagogies that are successful in dealing with learning disability. Yet, when policymakers fund and require teacher certification and child labeling and placement in such categories, or require educators to use such categories in the design of instruction, they reinforce invalid pedagogy to the detriment of at-risk children. Funding in such categories should be provided only when it is clear that *children benefit* from the practices associated with the category.
5. Finally, policymakers who attempt to ensure an adequate quality of performance for children at risk often use paper-and-pencil criteria rather than performance criteria when determining teacher competency. For

example, legislative requirements that teachers pass paper-and-pencil exams for admission to teacher education, for exit from teacher education, and for licensing ignore the fact that there is no guarantee that high scorers on such exams will be good teachers. At the same time, no data exist to show whether those who are excluded from teaching because of low scores on paper-and-pencil exams are poor teachers.

Taken together, these represent the types of public-policy decisions that may have an effect exactly the opposite of that intended.

MAKING PUBLIC POLICY FOR SUCCESS WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS

How can public policy change the outcome for children at risk? In view of the fact that public-policy actions can exacerbate the risks some children face, it is even more important for policymakers to realize the possibility and high desirability of appropriate use of public policy as an instrument for reducing the risks for at-risk children. With risk reduction as the goal, the following activities by policymakers should be considered.

1. At-risk children can be helped by public policies that support valid inservice training for the present teaching staff to improve both teaching methods and academic grounding in content. In the case of pedagogical training, public policy should support only such training as can be clearly demonstrated to improve teaching practices (as measured by positive changes in student performance).
2. In view of the fact that many successful approaches to serving at-risk children appear to be performed under isolated conditions, it is important that a massive effort to provide for the videotaped documentation of successful practice in natural school environments be supported. Such videotaped documentation can, over time, be carefully edited in order to illustrate in real terms that teachers can be successful with at-risk students and to show what it is about teaching that produces student learning. Many of the present audio-visual materials on teaching methodology are not done in live classrooms. They are contrived and in no way represent a realistic portrayal of what actually takes place in schools. Such videotaped documentation would be a major effort, one which has yet to be done on the scale necessary.
3. Public policymakers can require content equity in the educational program of the school. The school curriculum must be desegregated. All vestiges of racism, sexism, or any other kind of "ism" must be removed. But more than that, it is important to reconstruct the whole story of the *human* experience as it applies to every content area of the curriculum. A good example of how this can be achieved is the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools Multiethnic Curriculum Project. It is a project in which outstanding international

experts (with appropriate multiethnic backgrounds) in five academic disciplines, working with diverse ethnic community groups, completed a massive multiethnic curriculum change. The content areas were science, mathematics, language arts, art and music, and social science.

4. Policymakers can improve the educational environment for at-risk children by insisting that psychological assessments have instructional validity. "Instructional validity" means that the use of psychological assessment must be shown in the long run to be beneficial to children. Nothing is worse for at-risk children than to subject them to seemingly scientific assessment practices that do not have the ultimate result of contributing positively to their academic achievement. When a child is assessed and continues to perform below par, the impression is given that his or her low performance has been scientifically validated.
5. Policymakers can make a major contribution to the education of at-risk children by supporting the identification of local demonstration sites that are successful in the education of at-risk children. These sites could then be made available for professional visitation and their use encouraged. In addition to locating live-demonstration sites, policymakers should support research to document and validate the professional practices that are observed. Policymakers should reward success through its systematic study and its representation to the broader professional community.
6. Policymakers should insist on true reform of teacher education—reform that focuses on the clinical program for the training of teachers. In order to do this, the education program must be staffed by clinical professors who are able to demonstrate to teacher-education candidates the pedagogical strategies they represent, especially those strategies effective with at-risk students.
7. Policymakers can improve the educational environment for at-risk children by supporting an expanded co-curricula program for the schools. More than all other children, at-risk students need a broader exposure to the wider community in order to provide information and socialization opportunities most of them do not have. Over the past few decades, some schools have de-emphasized the co-curricula program in an attempt to focus more on the "basics." This should not be an "either/or" proposition but a "both/and" one, especially where at-risk children are concerned.
8. Finally, policymakers should set maximum-competency standards for all children and should then move to provide the services necessary for all children to reach maximum competency. To measure the effectiveness of schools by appeal to minimum-competency data is to institutionalize low expectations for children. The low expectations will be followed by low performance. On the other hand, reaching for the higher standards, if supported, can make a significant difference in the academic achievement of at-risk students.

CONCLUSION

Children are least at risk when we decide that their education is our highest priority. They are most at risk when we decide that the pedagogy required for them is complicated and beyond the reach of ordinary teachers. There are political problems that make it difficult for us to do what is best for our children. We must approach these as political rather than as pedagogical problems. All we need in order to solve the pedagogical problems is the will to do so. Certainly the efforts of the chief state school officers here and in further planned activities offer a bright ray of hope, perhaps the brightest in nearly a decade. If you [chief state school officers] are determined, we can win!

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